

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 851s.00/64 FOR Despatch #152

FROM Tunis ( Walker ) DATED June 26, 1933  
TO NAME 1-1127 ...

REGARDING: Race problems- Tunisia. Review of French naturalization movement in Tunisia. Discussion of the Italian, Moslem and Maltese elements in Tunisia.

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851S.4016/1

No. 152

AMERICAN CONSULATE,

Tunis, Tunisia, June 26, 1933.

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT: French Naturalizations in Tunisia.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

SIR

I have the honor to refer to despatches No. 126 of April 24, 1933, and No. 142 of June 3, 1933, from this Consulate, reporting public disturbances in Tunisia beginning April 15, 1933, resulting in dissolving, officially by decree, the "Destour" party and forbidding publication and circulation of three Arab newspapers. It was noted that the Tunisian "Destour" party took advantage of the opportunity to oppose burial of a naturalized French Arab in a Moslem cemetery, thereby discouraging further naturalization of Tunisian Moslems as French citizens.

It is interesting, therefore, at this time to review the French naturalization movement in Tunisia. In order to increase French dominance in this Protectorate, the naturalization campaign has receiv-



ed official government support and the cooperation of privately organized societies. The principal society active in this campaign is the "Comite "Bugeaud", which maintains offices at 184 Boulevard Saint-Germain, Paris, and 120 rue de Serbie, Tunis, circularizing propaganda for colonization of French farmers in Tunisia and naturalization of the various European races as well as native Moslems and Jews. Literature distributed by the "Comite Bugeaud" clearly warns France that to increase her hold on North Africa, it is necessary to encourage naturalization in Tunisia among both the European and native elements.

A close study of the last official census of population in Tunisia is particularly interesting in that it shows, for the first time, the French population more numerous, giving successful results to their naturalization program. A comparison of the 1926 and 1931 statistics, grouped according to the numerous nationalities reads as follows:

<u>Census of 1926</u>		<u>Census of 1931</u>
France	72,020	91,427
Italians	89,216	91,178
Maltese	8,398	8,643
Spaniards	517	449
Greeks	646	463
Other Europeans	3,436	3,133
Native )		
Moslems).....	1,932,184	2,159,151
Native Jews	<u>54,243</u>	<u>56,248</u>
Total	<u><u>2,160,708</u></u>	<u><u>2,410,692</u></u>



Status of French citizenship was automatically granted to the third generation of all Tunisian born European residents, except Italians, by a decree, approved in 1923. The latest available official naturalization statistics for Tunisia show that 23,150 were naturalized as French citizens during the period from January 1, 1924, to December 31, 1930. This number consisted of the following:

Italians	9,300
Maltese	6,250
Europeans	1,150
Native Jews	5,300
Native Moslems	1,150
Total	<u>23,150</u>

The Italian Element in Tunisia.

The large Italian colony in Tunisia has been one of the most difficult problems for France to handle. The Franco-Italian Convention of September 28, 1896, excerpts from which are attached as enclosure No. 1, grants to Italians the privilege to maintain their nationality in Tunisia and exempts them from the terms of the naturalization decree of 1923. A comparison of the number of French and Italian nationals in Tunisia since the establishment of the French Protectorate in 1881, reads as follows:

<u>Years</u>	<u>French</u>	<u>Italians</u>
1881	700	11,200
1886	3,500	16,750
1891	10,000	21,000
1896	16,000	55,000
1901	24,000	71,000
1906	34,600	81,000
1911	46,000	88,000
1926	71,020	89,216
1931	91,427	91,178



It will be seen in the above table that the largest increase of Italian nationals took place in the decade from 1891 to 1901. This increase was a result of heavy immigration. Subsequent to 1901, Italian immigrants ceased to come to Tunisia in large numbers. After the French naturalization campaign became active, 9,300 Italians were naturalized as French citizens between January 1, 1924, and December 31, 1930. The Italian Fascist Party is extremely active among the Italian subjects in it's effort to discourage Italians from accepting French citizenship. The French naturalization campaign appears, however, to be making satisfactory progress. Italians residing in Tunisia who are not members of the Fascist Party, look with favor on French citizenship for protection and privileges in the Protectorate.

The Moslem Element in Tunisia.

In attempting to extend its naturalization campaign, France is confronted with the active opposition of the Arab "Destour" or "Home Rule" party. Although officially dissolved the influence of the "Destour" Party remains a strong factor. Only 1,150 Moslems were naturalized from January 1, 1924, to December 31, 1930. The official press state that 10 Moslems were naturalized during the years 1931 and 1932. Apparently the naturalization of Moslems has been more or less restricted to minor employees in the



Government services, who are believed to take out French citizenship to benefit by special privileges which include 30 per cent. increase in salary compensation. The entire Moslem population of Tunisia in 1931 was 2,159,151 and probably a total of not more than 2,000 Moslems have been naturalized as French. The French naturalization movement has made little progress with the Moslems. The present Arab opposition, based on religious and political objections will no doubt discourage any great number of naturalizations in the near future.

The Maltese Element in Tunisia.

The density of population on the British island of Malta, and its proximity to Africa has resulted in a heavy emigration to French North Africa. Up to 1870, the Maltese constituted the majority of the Europeans residing in Tunisia. Statistics show that in 1881, at the time of the French Protectorate was established, there were 7,000 Maltese residing in this country. This number increased to 11,700 in 1901. Later, in 1911, only 11,300 Maltese remained in Tunisia, of which 2,300 were born in Malta. At that time, Europeans in Tunisia maintained their nationality on the same basis as in many other oriental countries. It was not until the Beylical decree of June 19, 1914, that the third generation of Tunisian born Europeans, except Italians, were automatically made Tunisian subjects (French protégés). This law



changed the nationality of many of the Maltese then residing in Tunisia for three or more generations. Later the dual sovereignty exercised in Tunis by the Beylical Government and the French Protectorate Government, brought about the approval of the Decree of 1923, automatically making French citizens of all the third generation of Tunisian-born Europeans, except Italians. The British Government protested bitterly against this decree which deprived a large number of Maltese of the privilege of remaining British subjects. Finally the case was referred to the International Court at the Hague, which rendered an indefinite decision, but was instrumental in bringing about the "Curzon de Saint Aulaire" Agreement between the British and French Governments. As a result of this agreement, over 5,000 Maltese British subjects residing in Tunisia, became French citizens. Official statistics show that there were a total of 8,643 Maltese residing in Tunisia in 1931.

#### Conclusion.

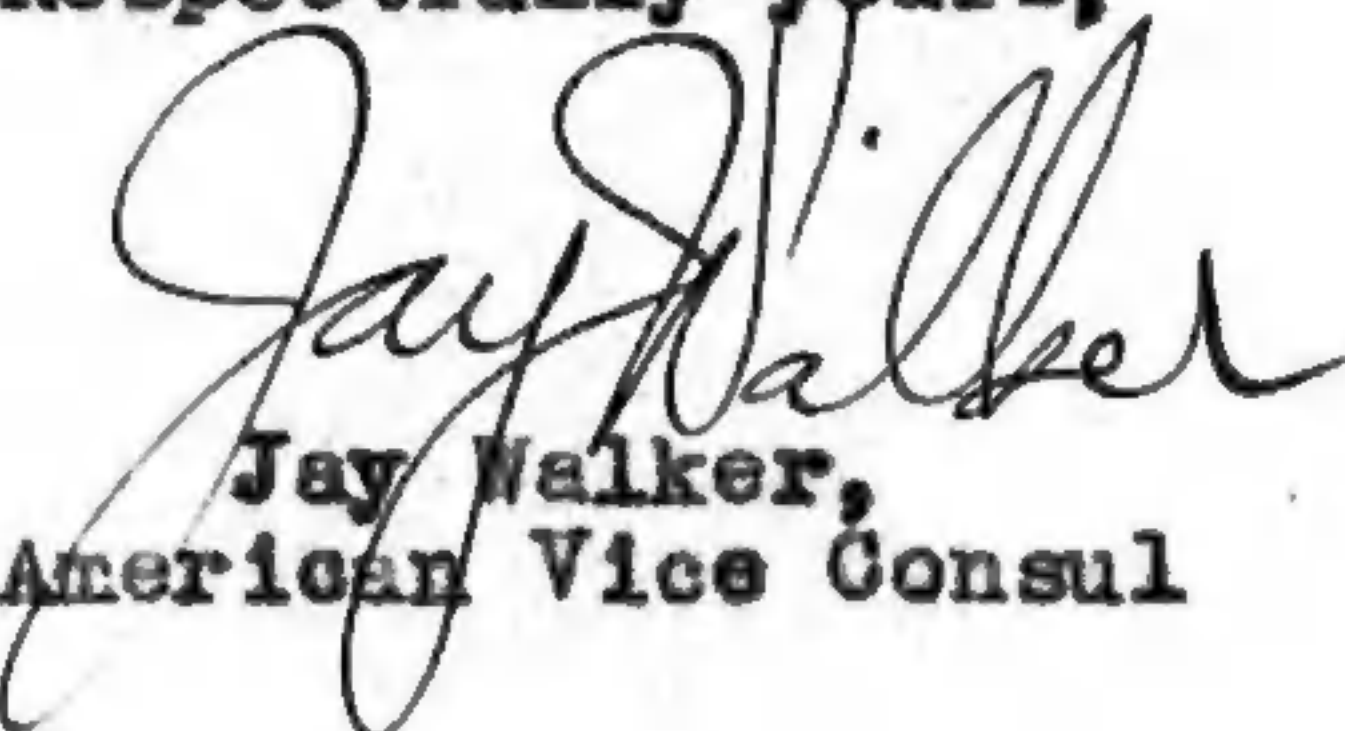
There is every reason to believe that France will continue its naturalization program in Tunisia. In the near future native-born French citizens will probably be greatly outnumbered by the naturalized French citizens. Current editions of the daily newspapers carry dispatches from Paris with names of recently naturalized French citizens. The "Dépêche Tunisienne"



of June 26, 1933, contained a naturalization list of 81 persons. The French will probably make greatest headway in their campaign amongst Italians and Jews. The latter race in Tunisia now numbers about 56,000 persons. Dissension between the Arabs and Jews in Tunisia has existed for centuries. The Jews may now look to France for protection and French citizenship will aid their cause.

There are about 30 American citizens residing in this Regency. Although a few are known to have resided many years in the Protectorate, there is no record of any having taken out French citizenship.

Respectfully yours,

  
Jay Walker,  
American Vice Consul

Enclosure:

No. 1. Part of Franco-Italian  
Convention of September  
28, 1896.

Source



Source of Information:

Personal interviews with  
Tunisian Government Officials.

Current editions of Tunisian  
newspapers.

"L'Etat Tunisien et le Protectorate  
Française" by Aristide Benazet.

"Les Problemes Tunisiens après 1921" by  
Rodd Balek.

"Dénombrement de la Population Civile  
Européenne et Indigène en Tunisie"  
by Tunisian Direction Générale de  
l'Interieur.

Five copies to the Department of State.

One copy to the American Embassy, Paris, France.



ENCLOSURE NO. I to despatch No. 152, of June 26, 1933.

EXCERPTS FROM THE FRANCO-ITALIAN CONVENTION SIGNED AT  
PARIS, FRANCE, SEPTEMBER 28, 1896.

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ARTICLE 13

Shall be considered as Tunisian subjects in Italy and as Italian subjects in Tunisia, those who will have retained according to the laws of their countries the Tunisian or Italian nationality.

PROTOCOLE

It is agreed that the provisions provided in Article 13 are not applicable to Italians who may have taken another nationality, either in Tunisia through an act of naturalization, or outside Tunisia through an act of naturalization or in consequence of a law.

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~~WE~~

# TELEGRAM RECEIVED

PT

1-1236

FROM GRAY

TUNIS via PARIS

Dated September 6, 1934

Rec'd. 10.30 a.m.

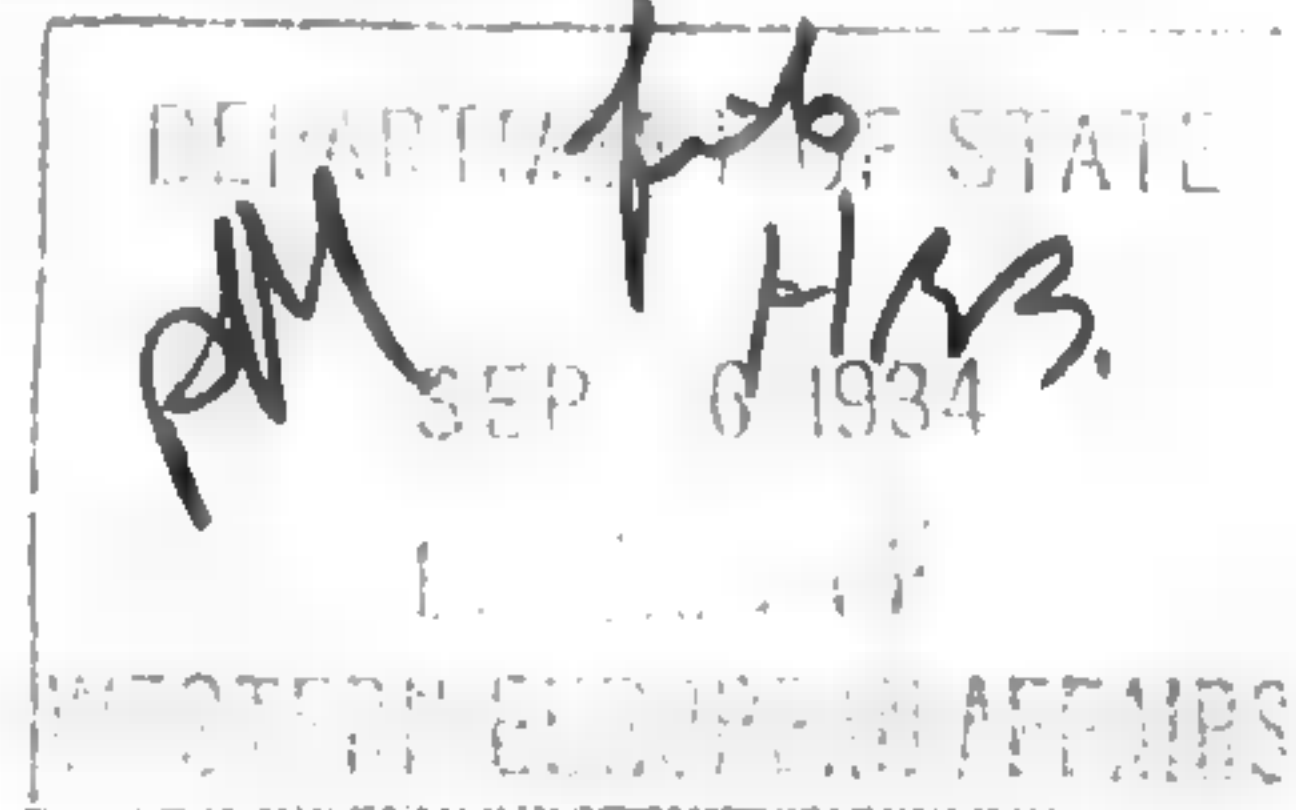
Secretary of State,  
Washington

September 6, 10 a.m.

As sequence Arab Jew rioting in Algeria and arrest of agitators at Tunis local Moslems are making disturbances various points in Tunisia. Official report admits four killed yesterday and numerous wounded. Cities now heavily patrolled by military forces. As far as known no American lives or property jeopardized.

WALKER

CSB  
WWC



851S.4016/2

GRC

FILED  
SEP 7 - 1934



# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE .....851s.00/75..... FOR .....deap..#80.....

FROM .....Tunis..... (.....Walker.....) DATED .....Sept.1, 1934.....

TO ..... NAME ..... 1-1187 ..... 070

REGARDING: Arab-Jewish Problem in Tunisia.

Rumors current that the Arabs in North Africa  
were planning boycott against Jews.

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851S.4016<sup>3</sup>  
/3



The last official ~~release~~ of Tunisia taken in 1931, shows the population of the various racial elements in this Regency as follows:

Europeans	195,293
Moslems	2,159,151
Jews	<u>56,248</u>
Total	<u>2,410,692</u>

From these figures it will be ~~seen~~ that approximately ninety per cent. of the total population of Tunisia consists of Moslems, an important proportion of which ~~are~~ Bedouins, living a nomadic life. The Arabs of the ~~interior~~ sects live in the cities and towns while some ~~are~~ attached to the farming elements. The ~~Jews~~ comprise not more than two per cent. of the total population, but have control of a large part of the finances of the country through money lending activities. Jews also make up the merchant classes of the Regency.

For centuries, the Arabs and Jews in this Regency lived together in communities under fairly peaceful conditions although historians refer to outbreaks which occurred when the Moslems felt that the Jews were gaining an unfair advantage in the commercial life of the country. The records of this office show that at the end of the World War, returning troops took part in riots against the Jews who were accused of acquiring wealth at home while patriots served in the military forces of France.

For several months, ~~rumors~~ have been current in this Regency that the Arabs in North Africa were planning a boycott against the Jews. Such action would include



refusal to pay exorbitant rates of interest for money borrowed, often reported to be as high as fifty per cent. per annum, and refusal to buy goods in shops owned by Jewish merchants. The riots at Constantine were the long awaited spark needed to bring the dissension to threats of action.

The outstanding causes of the present unrest of the Moslems in this Protectorate are:

- 1) Desire for independence apparently has always been the ambition of the Moslems of this Protectorate and from time to time the issue arises when there are periods of discontent.
- 2) Undoubtedly the Tunisian movement is influenced by socialistic and communist propaganda which is ever present through a press and political organizations.
- 3) Although the home rule group of Tunisians, known as the "Destour Party" and made up of the native classes, was legally suppressed after the disturbances in 1933, over burial of Moslems naturalized French citizens in Moslem cemeteries, the forces of this society remain in existence and carry on their work.
- 4) The Moslems of this area continue to feel bitter against the French authorities in forcing a compromise of the "cemetery affair" in 1933.
- 5) Economic crisis which affects the Arab agriculturist. The Government has fixed the price of wheat at 104 francs per 100 kilos. The Arabs find the grain brokers pay only from 60 to 80 francs per 100 kilos for grain and compel the seller to sign papers showing that the full legal price has been paid. Sales taxes are based on the legal prices. When taxes cannot be paid because of lack of funds, the Arabs are threatened with confiscation of their property.

Private money lenders have been charging exorbitant rates and now have in numerous cases a financial strangle hold on the property and resources of the individual Arab.

6) The Arabs state that the members of their race ~~are~~ paid much lower salaries than Europeans for equal work ~~in~~ the State controlled railways and other Government works. As an example, it is stated that a Moslem laborer supporting a wife and child receives 565 francs a month while other nationals, born in Tunisia, doing the ~~same~~ work receive 750 francs. The inequality in wage rates is greatly resented by the Moslems.

Since the news of the disturbances and rioting in Constantine has reached the Moslems of this area, the French have maintained heavy military forces in and around all the cities and towns of this Regency. In Tunis, the Jewish quarters known as the - La Hara - have been heavily policed by both military and civil forces. At the end of August 1934, the tension between the various elements ~~are~~ becoming very acute and serious difficulties ~~are~~ expected at any moment.



# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

8512.4016

SEE 8512.00/77 FOR #83

FROM Tunis ( Walker ) DATED Sept. 12, 1934  
TO NAME 1-1127 070

### REGARDING:

Public Disturbances. Unrest of the Moslems in Tunisia following the outbreak between the Arabs and Jews at Constantine, Algeria, in August 1934, finally resulted in the merchants of the Arab quarters - the Souks - of Tunis, Sfax, and Sousse closing their shops, beginning September 1, 1934 for several days.

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 851a.00/82 FOR Despatch #113

FROM Tunisia ( Armstrong ) DATED Jan. 11, 1935  
TO NAME 1-1127

REGARDING: Moslem unrest- Tunisia. The Moslems in the Regency are endeavoring to maintain an organization for effective protests against, what they consider, unjust treatment of their problems by the Protectorate Government.

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851S.4016/



## Moslem Unrest.

It will be recalled in a report from this Consulate on the subject of Moslem Unity in Tunisia, submitted in October 1934, that the Moslems in the Regency are endeavoring to maintain an organization for effective protests against, what they consider, unjust treatment of their problems by the Protectorate Government. The outbreaks against the Authorities, particularly in September 1934, and the exile of the Tunis leaders, were followed by a complete lull in the visible opposition to the Government. The more moderate groups attempted to have the Government release the exiled men before the "Ramadan" but without success.

The Tunisian "Destour" or home rule party which was officially dissolved by a Beylical decree in May 1933, continues to function but as an illegal society. Its present leaders are not only carrying on propaganda amongst the Moslems but surreptitiously distributing literature in the French language to foreign consulates in the form of appeals for sympathy to their cause. A

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copy of a recent appeal was left in the Consulate mail box in a plain envelope. The "Destour" are making a capital point of the fact that their exiled leaders are suffering undue hardships and that the Tunisian Government has not fulfilled its promise to release them in response to numerous protests of the Moslem people.

Rumors have been current that further public demonstrations will be carried out unless the exiled men are returned to Tunis. At the end of December 1934, a delegation called on the French Resident accompanied by thousands of sympathizers who waited on the streets around the Residency. It would appear that the Protectorate Government intends to continue to use firmness in handling the discontented Moslems in the Regency. This was further illustrated by the official announcement recently of the arrest and exile of some ten or eleven alleged agitators to Southern Tunisia.



# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

6

SEE 651a.00/92 FOR Dispatch 147

FROM Tunis ( Armstrong ) DATED March 8, 1956  
TO NAME 1-1197

REGARDING: Race problem- Tunisia. Discussion of Moslem affairs.

fp

851S.4016/6

Moslem Affairs.

On February 22 ~~and~~ 23, 1936, there occurred ~~several~~ small manifestations by native students ~~in~~ protest against a decree dated February 7 which ~~was~~ published in the Journal Officiel Tunisie of February 14 containing a provision that, after March 1, 1936, ~~a~~ government employee or civil official of Tunisian nationality, with the exception of magistrates with religious jurisdiction, would ~~be~~ appointed unless he had a working speaking knowledge of the French language. This ~~decree~~ also contained a provision to the effect that after March 1, 1936, ~~a~~ government employee or civil official of French nationality would ~~be~~ appointed unless he had a working knowledge of spoken Arabic. The ~~new~~ provisions ~~were~~ exactly the ~~same~~ except for the exemption granted ~~to~~ Tunisian magistrates. The ~~reason~~ for ~~these~~ requirements ~~was~~ the ~~desire~~ to ~~secure~~ ~~more~~ capable administrators and ~~a~~ employees and to enable those of each ~~group~~ to cooperate better and to have a better understanding of the other and its problems. It is reported that the underlying ~~reasons~~ for the manifestations by the students ~~were~~ the fact that they ~~were~~ told by certain agitators that the decree would require the teaching of French in the Moslem schools in the ~~country~~ and the fact that the decree was ~~made~~ effective so ~~soon~~ after its publication. The ~~number~~ of manifestants on February ~~22~~ ~~was~~ approximately 300 ~~and~~ they attempted to march to the Residence General to protest but they ~~were~~ dispersed

by the ~~authorities~~



by the police who made 33 arrests. The following day there were further demonstrations in which 500 students were involved and there were 13 arrests. During the disturbances a few policemen and students were injured, but none seriously and there were no fatalities. Of the students arrested, only one was over 21 years of age. They were promptly tried and the oldest and one other received a sentence of 10 months in prison and a fine of 700 francs. Seven others received sentences of eight months in prison and a fine of 700 francs each, one received three months and 700 francs fine, twenty students received three months and 175 francs fine and the others were acquitted. For boys and youths whose ages range from 15 to 20 years, it is admitted that these are severe penalties but they are felt by the local authorities to be necessary and all political agitators are similarly treated. Leniency is considered by the Arabs as a sign of weakness or of fear and they have to be shown that the government will tolerate no disturbances and that the authors or instigators when apprehended will have to pay for them severely.

During the period under review, the entry, circulation, distribution and sale of five publications of a nature tending to stir up or incite the Arabs was prohibited in Tunisia:

In the February 5 issue of the Tunis Soir, an evening newspaper published in Tunis, there appeared an article, written by a native Tunisian newspaper man, violently attacking and criticising the local government in its dealings with the small agriculturists as compared with the treatment accorded to the rich "colons" owning large estates. The same evening the author of the offending article was arrested and his expulsion from Tunisia was ordered. The following morning he was escorted by the police to the Tunis seaplane port where he was put on board the Air France hydroplane destined for

Marseille. -----

# DOCUMENT FILE

## NOTE

SEE 851s.00/96 FOR Despatch #265

FROM Tunis ( Armstrong ) DATED Sept. 4, 1936  
TO NAME 1-1127 SPG

REGARDING: Race problems- Tunisia. Discussion of Moslem affairs.

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851S.4016/7



## Moslem Affairs.

Early in July there was an incident at Gafsa, in the south western part of Tunisia in which a Tunisian, who had attacked a Jew, was killed by a policeman who was endeavoring to arrest him. As soon as the news spread through the village a mob of natives broke into and sacked various stores owned by Jews, and troops were called out to establish order.

Several meetings have been held by the Destour party during the months of July and August and some of the leaders of this party have been in Paris to approach the Government in regard to the reforms desired by them in the political, administrative, economic and social life of the country. Their aim is to have the natives placed on the same footing as the French in all respects and they appear to feel that certain concessions can be obtained from the present Government in Paris. Generally speaking, the French residing in Tunisia consider the Moslems inferior and they are opposed to equal-

ity -----

ity of status. The Destour party's aims are government of Tunisia by the Tunisians who represent approximately ninety per cent of the population, universal suffrage, a strictly Tunisian legislative assembly and a strictly Tunisian ministry.

During the period under review, the entry, circulation, distribution and sale of two newspapers published in Brussels and of one brochure published in Damascus of a nature tending to stir up or incite the Arabs were prohibited in Tunisia while the publication of three Arab newspapers in Tunisia, which had previously been suspended, was permitted. An Arab newspaper published in the city of Tunis was suspended for the period of one week.



# CROSS-REFERENCE FILE

## NOTE

### SUBJECT

Reports of growing animosity towards Italians in Tunisia  
since outbreak of war; comments on - .

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For the original paper from which reference is taken

See Despatch #232  
(Despatch, telegram, instruction, letter, etc.)

Dated Oct. 7, 1939 From Tunis, Heisler  
TP//

File No. 851a.00/159

851S.4016/ 8

A M E R I C A N   C O N S U L A T E

Tunis, Tunisia, October 7, 1939.

Subject:    Reports of Growing Animosity Towards  
              Italians in Tunisia.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

SIR:

I have the honor to report that many reports from private sources in Tunis indicate a growing animosity in Tunisia towards the Italian residents of this country. This feeling against the Italians appears to have developed very largely since the outbreak of the present war, and it seems to be the result of Italy's uncertain attitude and the freedom of the Italians in the country to conduct their personal affairs more or less without hindrance, while the French and Tunisians have been subject to mobilization orders.

Many French and Tunisians are of the opinion that the present situation is far too favorable to the local Italians, who can not be called for military service with the French forces. It enables the Italians to continue their means of livelihood and in some cases, it is asserted, they have improved their economic condition at the expense of the mobilized French and Tunisians.

Many



Many French and Tunisians have been forced, for the time being at least, to discontinue their commercial and professional activities, thus leaving the field of their endeavors to those who are not affected by mobilization orders. This is not pleasing to those who are now in the military service, and it is less pleasing to them to see the Italians, with whom they have been in disagreement for several years, profit by their absence.

The general mobilization orders at the beginning of the war included all French and Tunisian reservists, without favor, and most of the reservists were called to the colors within a few hours. Hence a considerable number of the reservists had no recourse but to discontinue their activities and face the possibility of a permanent loss of existing means of providing for themselves and for their families. In many instances, as the result of the sudden departure for military service, the wives of reservists were forced to seek employment in order to provide adequate support for their minor children.

Doctors, lawyers, dentists and other professional men are complaining that their practice is being lost to those of Italian nationality, and a complaint along the same line is being made by those engaged in commercial pursuits. Farmers complain of the inability to engage suitable help, in addition to which they make the charge that Italian farm laborers refuse assistance



or demand higher wages. In every walk of life, in fact, complaints of one kind or another are being reported on the part of the reservists.

Italian consular officers in Tunis refute the complaints as unjust and cite the large number of unemployed Italians in the country. Furthermore, French military officers, while admitting that hardships have occurred, are inclined to consider the complaints as greatly exaggerated.

It would appear to be quite true, however, that animosity towards local Italians has very considerably increased since the outbreak of the war and is becoming more and more noticeable, especially in this city where so many complaints against the Italians are now to be heard.

Respectfully yours,

Charles H. Heisler,  
American Consul.

Five copies to The Department,  
One copy to The Embassy, Paris,  
One copy to The Embassy, Rome,  
One copy to The Legation, Tangier,  
One copy to The Consulate General, Algiers.

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CHH:mr1